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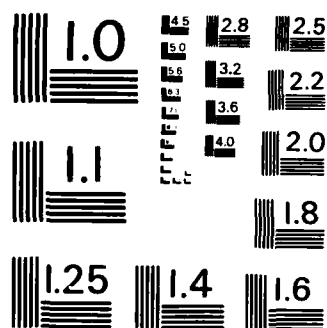
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David F. Ronfeldt

April 1985

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The Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138

RETHINKING THE MONROE DOCTRINE

David F. Ronfeldt

How important is the security of the Caribbean Basin to U.S. interests? The preferred answer has changed radically these last ten years. During the Carter Administration and earlier in the 1970s, global economic and strategic interdependence made the Basin, then at peace, seem so marginal to U.S. security concerns that the Monroe Doctrine was considered obsolete if not dead. In an abrupt return to tradition, the Reagan Administration has promoted global geopolitical views that make the Basin, now riddled with conflict, seem as vital to U.S. security as when the Monroe Doctrine was in vogue.

Public opinion has not responded easily to these shifts. After decades of believing in the sanctity of U.S. power in its "backyard", public opinion resisted the Carter Administration's campaign to accept the Panama Canal treaties--and in accepting them, lost touch with its traditional views of the region. Then, during the first years of the Reagan Administration, its critics severely challenged its arguments that the conflicts unfolding in Central America affected vital U.S. interests. Instead, counter-arguments were widely accepted that the sources of the conflicts were mainly internal to the region, and that neither Sandinista Nicaragua nor Castro's Cuba could really threaten U.S. security. Most Americans simply did not want to get involved in Central America.

By now, the eve of the second term of the Reagan Administration, public awareness of the region has increased substantially and perceptions are shifting. Agreement is spreading that Central America's

David Ronfeldt is a staff member of the Political Science Department of the Rand Corporation. A slightly shorter version of this paper appears in *ORBIS*, Winter 1985, pp. 684-96. The original version of the paper was presented at the conference on "Central America and the Caribbean in the 1980s: Security Perspectives and Prospects," at the Keck Center for International Strategic Studies, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California, December 10-11, 1984. The final version will be published in 1985 by the Keck Center in a volume titled after that conference, edited by P. Edward Haley.



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conflicts have external as well as internal causes; that the United States should prevent the consolidation of "another Cuba" in Nicaragua; and that the Soviet Union may benefit politically and militarily if it acquires military facilities there. Public concerns still run deep that the administration may resort to military force against Nicaragua or Cuba. However, beliefs are less widespread now than four years ago that the United States should acquiesce to revolutionary change and disengage from Central America. The public increasingly agrees that the United States should play a leading role in the region, though opinions remain divided over what that role should be.

Public acceptance of the Basin's importance is not the only recent change; the Administration's language about why the Basin is important is also evolving. During the first term, it relied on reciting a standard list of U.S. security interests: the security of vital sea-lanes and resources, and the need to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining additional military bases and allies near our borders. The language emphasized anti-communism, U.S. credibility, and the defense of democracy--all familiar to the public.

Now a dramatic new element has been mentioned: the Monroe Doctrine. Official reference to this traditional underpinning of U.S. policy surfaced informally in November 1984 when the media disclosed that a Soviet ship en route to Nicaragua might be carrying the MiG fighters the Sandinistas have long wanted to acquire. In the context of renewed warnings to the Soviet Union and Nicaragua to halt a possible build-up of advanced weapons in Nicaragua, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger noted, as a personal observation, "We shouldn't forget that the United States' policy for many decades has been governed by the Monroe Doctrine."¹

Few words in U.S.-Latin American relations are so loaded with historical and political symbolism. There are, in fact, many Monroe Doctrines. In its original form, conveying the aspirations of John Quincy Adams, James Monroe, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, the Doctrine told the European colonial powers to keep their hands off this

¹ See the analysis by Stuart Taylor Jr., "Washington Revival of Monroe Doctrine Gets Mixed Reviews," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1984, p. 6.

hemisphere and vowed support for the nascent democratic republics of Latin America. By opposing extra-hemispheric entanglements, our forefathers intended to protect the New World from falling prey to the balance-of-power rivalries of the Old World. Even today, reference to the Monroe Doctrine is thus a sure-fire way for the U.S. government to signal a powerful U.S. interest in regional security and warn extra-hemispheric actors to watch their steps. It may also mobilize nationalist sentiments among the U.S. public.

During the early twentieth century, however, the Doctrine was reinterpreted and corollaries applied so that the United States could pursue hands-on policies toward its neighbors. As a result of the profusion of U.S. interventions in Central America and the Caribbean between 1903 and 1934, the Doctrine began to symbolize some imperialist, hegemonic, and militarist tendencies in U.S. policies toward Latin America. Thus today, renewed references to the Doctrine risk arousing interventionist tendencies among the U.S. political right, and inevitably excite profoundly resentful, anti-U.S. passions among most of the governments and peoples of Latin America.

Is the Monroe Doctrine worth reviving in today's world? This paper argues that the strategic principles behind the Doctrine, including its various transformations, are as valid and relevant as ever. Compared to just listing specific U.S. interests, the principles provide a clearer picture of why the Caribbean Basin is important to U.S. security, and what U.S. policy and strategy should emphasize. Properly done at the right time, the elaboration of a doctrine may help an administration galvanize public support and direct policy behavior. However, since mere mention of the Monroe Doctrine may provoke automatic public criticism at home and throughout Latin America, this paper does not recommend renovating it by name. People mainly remember its negative repercussions, not its positive elements. Other, prudent language and symbols should be developed if the Reagan Administration moves from listing interests to defining a doctrine that is supposed to benefit our neighbors' interests as well as our own.²

² The central argument of this paper is synthesized from David Ronfeldt, *Geopolitics, Security, and U.S. Strategy in the Caribbean Basin*, The Rand Corporation, R-2997-AF/RC, November 1984.

FOUR KEY PRINCIPLES AND A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

For the United States, a secure Caribbean Basin has traditionally served two strategic functions: preventing extra-hemispheric powers from threatening the U.S. mainland and its approaches, and enhancing U.S. capabilities as a global power (especially through the use of sea lanes and resources in the Basin). To serve these functions, U.S. strategy has traditionally relied on the application of four principles:

1. The Caribbean Basin should be secure and friendly for U.S. presence, power, and passage;
2. Potentially hostile foreign powers should be prevented from acquiring military bases and facilities in the area;
3. Foreign balance-of-power struggles should be excluded and prevented from destabilizing the area;
4. Few U.S. military resources should be dedicated to protecting U.S. interests and assets there.

These principles are interconnected. The first one may hold only if the second and third are accomplished. Upholding the second and third may not assure the first, however, if underdevelopment and instability within the region create indigenous challenges to U.S. interests. The fourth principle, which equates to an economy-of-force doctrine for the U.S. military, may be sustained only if the preceding principles are accomplished.

Together, the four principles describe an ideal situation that U.S. strategy should strive to approximate. The principles serve a strategic imperative, rarely noted anymore, which fits the Basin into the broader context of U.S. global strategy:

The ability of the United States to act as a world power in a global balance-of-power system is greatly enhanced by the exclusion of that system and its related threats and struggles from the Basin.

Otherwise, instability and insecurity in the Basin may divert the United

States to an extent that constrains its ability to play its global roles from a position of strength, especially if the restoration of regional security should require large, prolonged U.S. military measures that contradict the fourth principle above.

In combination, these principles and the imperative have been unique to the Caribbean Basin. They have not all applied to South America, where it has been much more difficult and less important to exclude extra-hemispheric powers and their rivalries. The principles have applied even less to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, where security has often depended on maintaining a balance among outside powers and on the dedication of sizable U.S. military resources to regional defense. In sum, the principles and the imperative explain why, for most of this century, a relatively secure Southern perimeter has enabled the United States to give priority to its interests in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

CURRENT VIOLATIONS OF THE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

Today the United States faces massive violations of these principles. Only the first remains operative: The Caribbean Basin is still largely secure for U.S. power, passage, and presence. Petroleum and other resources remain accessible. Most governments are friendly to the United States. The insurgencies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia are nearly manageable. And Mexico remains relatively stable despite its mounting domestic difficulties and its exposure to Central America's conflicts.³

The second principle, exclusion of hostile military powers, is seriously violated. As the paramount superpower of the 1960s, the United States could tolerate the Soviet outpost in Cuba after 1962 because, after the Soviet missiles were removed, the threat seemed minor and the Caribbean still resembled an American lake. Since the 1970s, however, the strategic and nuclear balances have shifted away from clear U.S. superiority, and the Soviet military has developed a global

³ See David Ronfeldt, ed., *The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment*, Monograph Series, 15, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California at San Diego, 1984.

presence. By incrementally expanding the use of Cuba over two decades, the Soviet military now regularly visits the island with submarines, destroyers, and long-range reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft. A large electronic intelligence-gathering facility is located there. And Cuban forces are heavily armed with a wide range of advanced Soviet equipment, some of it suitable for offensive as well as defensive missions. Thus the United States must now assume that Soviet-Cuban forces could pose at least a plausible diversionary threat in some crisis situations.⁴ The continued expansion of these military capabilities, especially if accompanied by a military build-up in Nicaragua that facilitates Soviet military operations up the Pacific coast, would undermine the U.S. economy-of-force doctrine for the Caribbean Basin, open vulnerabilities in the U.S. and NATO defense postures, complicate U.S. defense planning for crises elsewhere, and damage perceptions of U.S. power around the world.

The third principle, exclusion of foreign balance-of-power rivalries, is virtually inoperative. Perhaps because a bipolar international system has characterized contemporary history, many present-day strategists have lost sight of the difference between the second and third principles. From the 1950s into the 1970s, keeping the Soviets out of the Caribbean Basin would satisfy both principles. But the world is again evolving toward a more multipolar system in which these two principles are separately important. The third means that regardless of whether extra-hemispheric powers are friendly or hostile toward the United States, strong roles by them in the Basin will naturally tend to internationalize local conflicts and link them to broader aspects of global competition. The conflicts in Central America reflect this: They are fractured not only by the U.S.-Soviet struggle but also by growing U.S.-European competition, Euro-centric rivalries between Christian Democratic and Social Democratic political parties, and Israel's struggle against the PLO and Libya. The Basin has recently been the world's most internationalized laboratory for revolutionary conflict.

⁴ See Edward Gonzalez, *A Strategy for Dealing with Cuba in the 1980s*, The Rand Corporation, R-2954-DOS/AF, September 1982.

Keeping our West European allies out of the Basin is not at all the point of the third principle. They contribute to economic development through trade, investment, and financial assistance programs, and they are the source of Christian Democratic and Social Democratic ideals that help strengthen democratic tendencies among moderate and center-left sectors in the region. These constructive roles benefit U.S. interests and should be selectively encouraged. But it would be a mistake to give the Europeans carte blanche for ever greater political involvement in the Basin. As revealed by various episodes of support for Nicaragua, opposition to U.S. policy in El Salvador, and tolerance of Communist ideological penetration, European interests and objectives differ from those of the United States. European political roles cannot substitute for strong U.S. roles in resolving the Basin's conflicts.

The fourth principle, economy of the U.S. military presence, remains barely in effect. The U.S. military has been circulating more forces through the Caribbean Basin than ever before. Despite post-Vietnam constraints on U.S. military involvement abroad, the intervention in Grenada (whose brevity and scale did not violate the fourth principle) proved successful and popular, terminating views that the United States would posture but not fight. Large, frequent military exercises in Honduras and the Caribbean have also served notice that the United States has the ability to use force alongside diplomacy. All this activity reassures local allies who depend on U.S. military assistance programs. And it reminds Nicaragua that if it acquires MiG fighters or other advanced weapons, the United States may destroy them with air strikes or other precision methods that minimize civilian casualties. However, U.S. planning estimates for major contingencies (e.g., against Cuba or Nicaragua) yield such large, costly numbers, potentially violating the fourth principle, that hardly anyone wants to prepare seriously for them.

Conditions in Central America and the Caribbean may seem more stable now than two years ago. Yet these cross-cutting violations of the strategic principles still jeopardize, for the first time this century, the historic imperative that explains the Basin's role in U.S. global strategy: To enhance U.S. abilities to act in the global balance-

of-power, extra-hemispheric threats and struggles should be excluded from the Basin. If current adverse trends continue unabated, the United States may have to divert excessive military and other resources to deal with regional insecurity--to the detriment of U.S. strength and flexibility elsewhere, and to the angry distress of our Latin American neighbors.

THE FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF CARIBBEAN BASIN SECURITY

In the 1970s, for the first time in U.S. history, global "interdependence" became more important than regional "geopolitics" in strategic thinking. Traditional arguments about the Basin's importance began sounding like anachronistic litany, and Basin security no longer seemed crucial to U.S. global security and strategy.

Now, it appears, we have entered a new historical phase of the Basin's importance. As in the past, this rising importance derives largely from basic changes in the global and domestic conditions of U.S. power, as well as from changes and conflicts in the region. Indeed, the logic of the strategic principles and imperative has been most easily understood in periods of global systemic change, including the rise of new power contenders, when an intrusion into the Basin by one foreign power has prompted competitive intrusions by others that ultimately threaten to divide and balkanize the Basin. The following global and domestic trends may thus assure the Basin's importance to U.S. security for the rest of this decade.

Global balance of power patterns are in flux: The residue of bipolarity is strong, but the international system is becoming more multipolar, with the Western alliance system seeming especially loose. Patterns of conflict, competition, and cooperation are in flux around the world, largely because of the continuing resurgence of the major Western European nations, Japan, and China as global actors.

A new naval power is on the rise: The growing blue-water capabilities of the Soviet Navy are enabling the USSR to challenge the U.S. presence around the globe. Soviet naval flotillas have visited Cuba regularly since 1969.

New technologies enhance the efficacy of overseas bases: For both the United States and the Soviet Union, the development of ever more sophisticated weapon, transportation, and electronic communications systems is increasing the geopolitical and military value of having overseas bases and other facilities contiguous to their adversaries. Such facilities enhance medium-range power projection, reconnaissance, and intelligence gathering.

The growing likelihood of confrontations in Third-World regions: A NATO-Warsaw Pact war in Europe and a U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the Persian Gulf will remain the most dangerous threats--but also the less likely ones. Geopolitical and technological trends suggest that the Soviet Union and the United States are likely to test each other in far-flung locations where geographic positions, raw materials, or power perceptions are at stake. Both governments are having to face and are working to create "threats from the South," formerly their flanks of greatest security.

Potential for greater regionalism in global economic relations: In many industrialized nations, the rise of protectionist sentiments has combined with a reevaluation of national economic interests to weaken the formerly strong support for further liberalizing the international trading system and emphasizing global economic interdependence. Now that the United States may no longer dominate international trade, investment, and technology relations, the major alternative being voiced here and abroad is the construction of trading blocs along regional lines. The United States already anticipates that a Pacific Basin orientation will succeed our former Atlantic and global orientations. A new trend toward regionalism also appears in the Caribbean Basin Initiative and other measures to strengthen U.S. economic relations with Canada and Mexico.

Potential for domestic spillovers from regional unrest: Caribbean Basin politics intrude on domestic U.S. politics more than ever before, and more so than for any other Third-World area. Law, order, and security concerns within the United States cannot be isolated from major events and trends in the Basin. The primary linkage is through massive immigration, refugee, and exile flows: The United States receives more

immigrants and refugees than all the rest of the world combined and many of these come from within the Basin. The (unlikely) extension of Central American conflicts into Mexico or Puerto Rico would thus have dangerous and unpredictable domestic consequences. Meanwhile, the prognosis is for continued large immigration flows. Terrorism and low-level violence represent another domestic connection. This includes violence conducted within the United States by revolutionaries from the Basin (e.g., Puerto Rican FALN), by local right-wing exiles (e.g., Cubans, El Salvadorans, or Nicaraguans in Miami), by left-wing exiles or sympathizers supporting revolution abroad, and by narcotics smugglers.

In sum, the Basin's importance to U.S. security will remain high throughout this decade if global and domestic trends keep raising the ultimate concerns of U.S. security in the Basin: the effect of local threats and conflicts on U.S. positions, responsibilities, and priorities around the world; and the exposure of the U.S. mainland to potential threats and spillovers.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

As a framework, the four strategic principles and the imperative thus direct U.S. policy to treat the Basin as a geopolitical zone of unique importance for U.S. security. Translating the principles into long-term objectives would mean that U.S. security strategy should emphasize:

- Reducing the revolutionary conflicts and restoring stability;
- Arresting Soviet and Cuban military expansion;
- Diminishing the divisive intrusion of all external rivalries, including European ones;
- Accomplishing the above without major reliance on military instruments.

This does not specify precisely what steps the United States should take in Central America and the Caribbean, but some guidelines may be inferred. For example, the framework does not rule out military action to eliminate potential threats; but the fourth principle argues against the militarization of the Basin as the solution to local security

problems. The framework cannot instruct whether to convene negotiations to settle a regional conflict; but should negotiations be desirable, the framework would imply that European participation be minimized. Although the framework opposes the intrusion of intra-European and U.S.-European rivalries into the Basin, it does not object to normal commercial competition or the influx of European political ideas. The framework does not claim to prefer democracy, dictatorship, or some other form of local government; yet it is inherently biased against Marxist-Leninists because they are prone to establish regimes that would eventually align with the Soviet Union or other foreign power. The framework is not inherently biased against revolutionary regimes that have socialist economic tendencies, if those regimes deny extra-hemispheric entanglements and observe U.S. security and military interests. The framework does not define how central a role the United States should play in the Basin; yet its principles can be met only if the United States is the paramount power and has broad political, economic, and military involvement.

As I have proposed at length elsewhere, U.S. policy should therefore respond to the four classic, positive challenges that have faced the United States ever since it became involved in this region a century ago:

1. Engaging and accommodating Latin American nationalism;
2. Strengthening moderate democratic forces;
3. Fostering socioeconomic development;
4. Building constructive military relations.

In the past, the United States has responded to these challenges in a reactive on-and-off fashion, with the Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s and the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s being the most positive efforts. Today, sustained progress with each challenge is required to achieve a new long-term partnership based on mutual respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.⁵

⁵ See Ronfeldt, November 1983, and Edward Gonzalez, Brian Jenkins, David Ronfeldt, and Caesar Sereseres, *U.S. Policy for Central America: A Briefing*, The Rand Corporation, R-3150-RC, March 1984.

This should appeal to our Caribbean and Central American neighbors. Any notion of enforcing the Monroe Doctrine *per se* would be anathema to them; nor would U.S. interests be served well by applying principles that may meet Soviet/Cuban threats but that end up alienating our friends and allies in the region. However, the strategic principles identified here, which depart from traditional U.S. needs to protect its own security, lead to a policy framework that requires the United States to listen to its neighbors, support political democracy and economic development, and enhance collective security.

For these principles to truly appeal to our neighbors, however, they would have to make their own assessments of why a secure Basin and good U.S. relations are important to their interests. The nature of nationalism suggests that they would want to see themselves gaining more than material benefits (e.g., economic aid, trade concessions) from a close partnership with the United States that resists extra-hemispheric entanglement in favor of hemispheric solidarity. Contemporary nationalism in most Caribbean Basin countries subscribes to a doctrine of diversification that calls for expanding economic and political relations with outside powers and actors in order to reduce the area's tremendous dependence on the United States, and improve the ability of local leaders to bargain with the United States. The principles advocated in this study would thus require nationalist leaders to question whether their long-range interests are truly served by inviting extra-hemispheric actors to balance U.S. influence and allowing local conflicts to become so internationalized as to risk a balkanization of the region.

TWO FUTURE ISSUES

The Reagan Administration has made some halting progress along the lines proposed here. Without discussing this progress and the many difficulties that remain, however, I would like to conclude by commenting on two issues that loom for the second term of the Reagan Administration: the scale of U.S. involvement in Central America, and the possible initiation of a broad U.S. policy for Latin America and the Western Hemisphere. The strategic principles identified above provide some guidance for both issues.

Toward Moderate U.S. Involvement

It is often argued that the United States should pursue either much lower or much higher involvement in Central America and the Caribbean, as though the ultimate U.S. goal should be virtual disengagement or hegemony. Critics of U.S. policy have been particularly vocal in claiming that the growing U.S. involvement will arouse nationalist anger and create more conflict.

Both sides in these arguments have missed an important consideration: In general, relatively "moderate" levels of U.S. political, military, and economic involvement may have more favorable and fewer adverse effects on U.S. interests and local political and military conditions than do "low" or "high" levels. Moderate U.S. involvement may best meet the expectations of Central American political elites, whereas a diminished or excessive U.S. presence may drive them to look elsewhere for allies--contrary to the strategic principles.

U.S. involvement seems most likely to have adverse consequences when the United States disengages politically, economically, and militarily, as it did during the 1970s, or when it overreacts to events and imposes highly interventionist policies. For example, the U.S. disengagement from Central America during the 1970s probably helped foster the internationalization of the area's conflicts: It motivated local elites and counter-elites to seek new allies outside their countries, and opened the door for other regional and extra-hemispheric actors to get involved in the Nicaraguan revolution. In contrast, warning signs have appeared recently that the expansion of U.S. involvement in Honduras has begun to disturb civil-military relations and arouse nationalist antipathy.

Just as the Carter Administration may have retrenched too far, the Reagan Administration may have to beware of trying to do too much too quickly for our neighbors. In a very general sense, U.S. involvement should help each recipient cope with its security and development problems, in a way that strengthens the hand of moderate, democratic forces and matches local capacities to absorb U.S. economic and military assistance. If appropriate scale is exceeded, the recipient may put the burden of responsibility and proof on the United States; bitter

nationalist criticisms may be mobilized against U.S. imperialism and paternalism; moderate civil-military coalitions may fragment; and local economic conditions may be distorted.

Little is actually known about how and why the scale (not to mention the style and substance) of U.S. involvement may affect U.S. influence, political stability, and other local conditions. The answers may vary for each country, depending on its history. Yet there are enough experiences--e.g., Iran under the Shah, the Alliance for Progress--to warn against the potential ill effects of high U.S. involvement.

Our neighbors should have a say in this. It was not a good sign when some countries' leaders presented excessive requests for economic aid to the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America (the Kissinger Commission). A more balanced expression of hope comes from army commanders in El Salvador who have claimed that before long their forces should need fewer U.S. military advisers and trainers.

Toward a New U.S.-Latin American Partnership

The Reagan administration has had to focus on Central America and the Caribbean during its first term. A policy window is opening, however, to seek a new U.S. partnership with Latin America as a whole--perhaps even to develop an initiative of historic proportions that would compare favorably with the Good Neighbor Policy and the Alliance for Progress. President Ronald Reagan has long harbored a dream of strengthening mutual cooperation throughout the Western Hemisphere; he sustains a Jeffersonian belief that the New World remains man's best hope for peace, progress, and freedom.⁶

The opportunity arises because conditions in U.S.-Latin American relations have improved in the last two years. By now, the guerrilla insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala may be nearly manageable. The debt crisis in South America has eased and no longer dominates the

⁶ See the speech by President Reagan, "The United States and Brazil," delivered to U.S. and Brazilian leaders, Sao Paulo, Brazil, December 2, 1982, reprinted in *Realism, Strength, Negotiation: Key Foreign Policy Statements of the Reagan Administration*, United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C., May 1984, pp. 122-24.

policy agenda there. The anti-U.S. reactions to U.S. support for Great Britain in the Falklands crisis have quieted down throughout Latin America. The intervention in Grenada has strengthened cooperation in the Eastern Caribbean. The progress toward democracy occurring throughout Latin America has lifted the spirits of many Americans, North and South, who have opposed the prevalence of military dictatorships. Various leaders in South America and the Caribbean who have complained that U.S. attention to Central America is excessive would like to see renewed U.S. attention to socioeconomic development needs throughout the hemisphere. And the U.S. public, responding to immigration as well as security issues, has grown more aware of U.S. interests to the South.

There are sound strategic reasons for exploring this opportunity. Some have to do with changes that I noted earlier in the global distribution of economic and military power that raise Latin America's general importance to U.S. interests. In addition, a newly hemispheric approach to U.S. policy would help the United States cope with a major change looming for the region: The implementation of the Panama Canal treaties requires the U.S. military to end most of its traditional presence in Panama by the year 2000. Thus, the United States faces major decisions on the kinds of U.S. military bases, force postures, and command structures that will be needed in this hemisphere to prevent threats to U.S. interests and facilitate hemispheric cooperation. These decisions would be easier to make and implement were U.S.-Latin American relations strengthened first.

What a U.S. initiative toward Latin America should look like is a question that lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, the administration's current policy toward Central America and the Caribbean--especially the four parts to support political democracy, economic development, the security of threatened nations, and dialogue and negotiations in the region--already provides the building-blocks for a broader initiative.

The major obstacle would be Nicaragua. A U.S.-Latin American initiative would not have to incorporate Cuba, but Nicaragua's evolving situation touches too many sensitive nerves to be ignored or circumvented. If the Reagan administration really does want to expand its policy focus and consolidate a new hemispheric relationship, it will

have to settle the Nicaraguan problem in the first year of its second term. If our neighbors want the United States to broaden its policy horizons, it would behoove them to support us in dealing with Nicaragua.

What is ultimately needed in the Basin is a collective security approach that engages the larger nations--Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela--to act in concert with the United States and the smaller Basin nations, on the basis of mutually agreed goals and methods, to end the Soviet/Cuban presence, the incremental military buildup, and the consolidation of a closed Leninist dictatorship in Nicaragua. A Contadora-type agreement that works could provide a good, peaceful outcome, but there is not much time left to succeed with that approach. Unilateral U.S. military action against Nicaragua would be costly for the United States. But if the Contadora process cannot succeed, if Honduras requires an exorbitant price for U.S. security cooperation, and if Nicaragua continues on a course of camouflaged Cubanization, then the costs of pursuing a peaceful solution will also be high. The worst outcome for U.S. interests would be to let matters drift, hoping for a break that never comes, militarizing the rest of Central America, and watching the Sandinista regime gradually convert Nicaragua into another Cuba, while U.S. and other analysts argue (as they have done for years with Cuba) that there is little the United States can do by way of pressures on, or concessions to Nicaragua.

It will not be possible to build a healthy U.S.-Latin American partnership if conditions in the Caribbean Basin continue to violate the strategic principles and imperative identified above.

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